DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 370 499 HE 027 459

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TITLE The Kutztown University-Allentown School District Academic Alliance: A Partnership That Works.
PUB DATE [94]
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Career Awareness; *College School Cooperation; Cooperative Programs; *Educational Opportunities; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *High Risk Students; *Partnerships in Education; Program Development; Program Effectiveness; Summer Programs; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS *Allentown School District PA; *Kutztown University PA

ABSTRACT

The Kutztown University-Allentown School District Academic Alliance in Pennsylvania, with the support of the corporate sector, provides higher education opportunities to academically at-risk middle school and high school students. Alliance activities include workshops on study skills and self-esteem, workshops for parents on career awareness and financial aid, and a summer residence program on campus. The university and the school district have a shared commitment to all aspects of the program, including planning, implementation, evaluation, and monetary support. This shared commitment requires the collaboration of school district teachers, counselors, and administrators with university professors, administrators, and graduate students. Results of the Alliance include increased opportunities for students and parents, increased support for the school district, and faculty satisfaction derived from direct involvement with students. The Alliance is considered to contain four elements of successful college-school partnerships: timeliness, mutuality, trust, and results. School-university partnerships are seen as a critical step in meeting the challenges and demands of education in the 21st century. (JDD)

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The Kutztown University - Allentown School District Academic Alliance: A Partnership that Works

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The Kutztown University-Allentown School District Academic Alliance: A Partnership that Works

Universities can no longer serve as ivory towers for a selected student population, but must contribute significantly to the improvement of human welfare by directing academic resources toward public schools. This expanded view of university function includes collaboration and linkage with school districts; it my also include the formation of partnerships or alliances with school districts. Such partnerships afford a blending of talents and resources to the benefit of all involved.

According to Smith and Auger (1985-86), successful college - school partnerships contain the following elements: timeliness, mutuality, trust, and results.

Timeliness

The current national educational reform movement challenges colleges and universities to establish new and genuine partnerships with local schools. To meet this challenge, the Kutztown University - Allentown School District Academic Alliance was designed to unite the resources of Kutztown University, Kutztown, Pennsylvania; and Allentown School District, Allentown, Pennsylvania. With the support of the corporate sector, the Alliance provides opportunities for higher education to academically at-risk middle school and high school students in the Allentown School District.

This alliance is a timely initiative that seeks to improve educational opportunity for students. The model encourages at-risk students to consider higher education as an attainable goal.

Mutuality and Trust

Open communication and mutual dependence are vital components in partnership programs. Kutztown University and the Allentown School District have a shared commitment to all aspects of the program including planning, implementation, evaluation, and monetary support. This shared commitment to excellence in the education of all children requires the collaboration of school district teachers, counselors, and administrators with University professors, administrators, and graduate students. Allentown School District counselors and administrators establish and maintain frequent and open communication with students and parents in the program; Kutztown University and graduate student faculty volunteer time, energy and expertise to provide workshops to enhance student self-esteem and develop study skills throughout the academic year. Kutztown University administrators provide workshops for the participants' parents in the areas of career awareness, financial aid options, and motivation and support of students.

A summer residence program is held on campus each year for students in the alliance. Two, week-long sessions are offered every July during which time students live in dormatories and participate in classes taught by university professors. Subjects taught thus far have included telecommunications, biology, art, creative writing, and physical education. Social activities are also part of the program. The week is concluded with an awards banquet featuring a keynote speaker. Staffed by the alliance coordinator and university students, the summer residence program

has been evaluated by most alliance students as challenging and enjoyable.

Mutuality and trust in this partnership have been seen in a common mission, lack of territoriality and a shared commitment to the excellence of all students.

Results

It is critical for each partner in a partnership to perceive the advantages of working together. The results of the Academic Alliance have been three-pronged:

1. increased opportunities for students and parents
2. increased support for the School District
3. faculty satisfaction derived from direct involvement with students

Although the long-term results of the partnership remain to be studied thoroughly, short-term results are promising. The greatest benefits thus far have been for students. The Kutztown University-Allentown Alliance has provided students with opportunities for academic and social growth, cultural awareness, and arts appreciation. The successes students are experiencing have enhanced the partnership, and indications for lasting impact are strong. Curriculum support for the school district has been evidenced in the areas of career awareness, goal-setting, and tutorial and parenting programs.

For university faculty, participation in the partnership was reported as professionally uplifting. Faculty appreciated the chance to experience a new educational role that included direct interactions with public school students.

For those involved in the Academic Alliance it has become apparent that public schools and universities are more influential and effective when working as partners rather than independently.

School-university partnerships are not just another swing of the educational pendulum. They are a critical step in meeting the challenges and demands of education in the 21st century.

References

Smith, S.D. & Auger, K. (1985-86). Conflict or cooperation? Keys to success in partnerships in teacher education. Action in Teacher Education, 7 (4), 1-9.